

February 22, 1999

## **Bombing, or Ground Troops — or Both**

# **Clinton Kosovo Intervention Appears Imminent**

The Clinton Administration appears to be on the verge of military intervention in Kosovo. Depending on the outcome of the talks currently underway in France, the intervention — the result of a course set by the Administration several months ago — might involve NATO airstrikes against Serbia and/or a NATO ground force to police a settlement. [For a full analysis of the Administration's course on Kosovo, a province in Serbia with a majority ethnic Albanian population, and of the complex history of the Kosovo problem, see RPC's "Bosnia II: The Clinton Administration Sets Course for NATO Intervention in Kosovo," 8/12/98.]

If the talks produce an agreement, a NATO force of 28,000 (including 4,000 Americans) would be dispatched to Kosovo immediately. If no agreement is reached, and the failure of the talks is the result of Belgrade's refusal to accept a NATO occupation force in Kosovo, the result would be a bombing campaign against Serbia until it reconsidered its position. Accordingly, as intervention in some form appears both inevitable and imminent, the following observations are appropriate.

## **Ground Troops, With or Without Air Strikes**

Among top foreign policy observers, there is widespread hesitation and even opposition to the deployment of American ground troops to Kosovo as part of a NATO peacekeeping force, especially one that will not be under American command. [See, for example, *Washington Post*, 2/22/99: "No U.S. Ground Forces for Kosovo: Leadership Doesn't Mean That We Must Do Everything for Ourselves," by Henry Kissinger.] The use of air power to compel Serbian acceptance of the proffered settlement may appear (as it did in Bosnia) as a less intrusive step that might be taken with less risk to Americans.

However, a NATO air campaign against Serbia would almost certainly be *followed* by the proposed ground force due to the manner in which the Clinton campaign has constructed both the military and political modalities regarding its Kosovo policy:

- First, an air campaign likely would be executed with a preponderance of American air power.

- ▶ Second, the Clinton Administration would be using air power for the express purpose of securing Serbian agreement to allow the proposed NATO ground force to deploy in Kosovo, pursuant to a January 30 NATO ultimatum to Belgrade.
- ▶ Third — and most importantly — airstrikes would take place at American insistence, despite the reluctance of our European allies, who agreed to support the use of air power *only* if Americans would commit to take part in a ground deployment. This explains the Clinton Administration's reversal from its earlier refusal to participate in a ground mission, which the Pentagon's Joint Staff and Defense Secretary Cohen less than a month ago "firmly opposed . . . because they believe such a mission would evolve into a long-term commitment, as has been the case in Bosnia." [See *Washington Post*, 1/23/99: "Allies Balk At Bombing Yugoslavia; Europeans Want U.S. In Ground Force."] The NATO ultimatum, backed with the threat of airstrikes, came days after the Clinton Administration agreed to put Americans on the ground. [See *Washington Post*, 1/27/99: "U.S. Could Join Force to Manage Postwar Kosovo."] The result is that the Administration shows no sign of backing off its acquiescence to the demand by our European allies (identical to the one they made in Bosnia) that *they* will not support a ground force in Kosovo *unless* it includes Americans — nor will they support American demands for airstrikes unless they are followed up with Americans on the ground.

In short, as was the case in Bosnia, the use of NATO air power almost certainly would lead directly to a U.S. ground presence: once the United States has defined Kosovo as a problem to be solved by the application of American power, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to stop at step one. Bill Clinton has painted U.S. policy into a corner of either a ground presence directly after an agreement is signed, or the use of air power to get an agreement — followed by a ground presence. Thus, application of air power would not be a *substitute* for a NATO ground deployment but, more likely, a means to *achieve* such a deployment.

## The Clinton "New" NATO vs. the Old NATO

In his 1999 State of the Union address, Bill Clinton promised to define "new missions" for NATO. This was a clear reference to the Administration's "new NATO" doctrine, which effectively would turn the alliance into a regional peacekeeping organization — a sure recipe for more Bosnia- and Kosovo- type missions. [See RPC's Legislative Notice No. 55, Treaty Doc. 105-36, 3/18/98.]

Far from enhancing regional stability, however, NATO intervention in Kosovo easily could result in more non-defense-related missions, further overextending the resources of U.S. forces and undermining the alliance's traditional mission of collective defense. Observes Kissinger (in the *Washington Post* piece cited earlier):

"Ironically, the projected peace agreement increases the likelihood of the various possible escalations sketched by the president as justifications for a U.S. deployment. An independent Albanian Kosovo surely would seek to incorporate

the neighboring Albanian minorities — mostly in Macedonia — and perhaps even Albania itself. And a Macedonian conflict would land us precisely back in the Balkan wars of earlier in this century. Will Kosovo then become the premise for a NATO move into Macedonia, just as the deployment in Bosnia is invoked as justification for the move into Kosovo? Is NATO to be the home for a whole series of Balkan NATO protectorates?”

The inescapable Clinton answer is: yes.

## **Serious Questions About the Safety of U.S. Personnel**

Upon achievement of a peace agreement, Serbian forces would be withdrawn from the province and replaced by NATO troops. Also, the agreement would mandate the disarming of the main force on the Albanian side, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). However, there are serious questions about the feasibility of disarming the KLA. Kissinger: “The KLA is certain to try to use the cease-fire to expel the last Serbian influences from the province and drag its feet on giving up its arms. And if NATO resists, it may come under attack itself — perhaps from both sides.”

This danger is compounded by the fact that the main KLA staging area in northern Albania, centered on the town of Tropoje, is known to be an area of activity of radical Islamic groups connected to the notorious terrorist Osama bin Laden. [See *Washington Post*, 8/12/98: “U.S. Blasts’ Possible Mideast Ties: Alleged Terrorists Investigated in Albania.”] From KLA bases in northern Albania, which is effectively beyond the control of what remains of the Albanian central government, Islamic terrorists could find American peacekeepers in Kosovo a tempting target. In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on February 2, 1999, CIA Director George Tenet warned of the worldwide threat posed by the bin Laden network:

“There is not the slightest doubt that Osama bin Laden, his worldwide allies, and his sympathizers are planning further attacks against us. Despite progress against his networks, bin Laden’s organization has contacts virtually worldwide, including in the United States. And he has stated unequivocally that all Americans are targets. Bin Laden’s overreaching aim is to get the United States out of the Persian Gulf, but he will strike wherever in the world he thinks we are vulnerable. We are anticipating bombing attempts with conventional explosives, but his operatives are also capable of kidnappings and assassinations. We have noted recent activities similar to what occurred prior to the African embassy bombings, Mr. Chairman, and I must tell you that we are concerned that one or more of bin Laden’s attacks could occur at any time.”

## **European Burdensharing vs. American Leadership**

In testimony before the House International Relations Committee on February 10, 1999, Defense Undersecretary for Policy Walter B. Slocombe alluded to the tensions between the United

States and our NATO allies caused by the Clinton Administration's insistence on dictating the terms of the Kosovo intervention. He specifically addressed the issue of why what he called "KFOR" (for the "Kosovo Force") would not be under American command:

"The United States in some important sense can't have it both ways. We can't both say we insist on being a significant but relatively small percentage of the total, and we insist on command. . . . I'm sure that if we were prepared to send 75 percent of the troops we could get the command."

However, what Undersecretary Slocumbe did not mention is that the presence of Americans in a non-American-commanded KFOR is itself the result of the Clinton Administration's insistence that the Europeans accept a NATO decision to threaten use of air power if diplomacy fails to produce a Kosovo agreement. There is a close parallel here with the Administration's policy in Bosnia, where the Europeans' failure to achieve a settlement was used to justify deeper American participation — a European failure that was largely due to the Clinton Administration's active undermining of European efforts. For example, in Bosnia, the Clinton Administration torpedoed the Vance-Owen and Owen-Stoltenberg peace plans (which provided for a large degree of local autonomy, called "cantonization," as an antidote for nationalism) and helped the Iranians ship in weapons. Regarding Kosovo, the French mediators have in hand a cantonization proposal that would not require the presence of U.S. troops — only Europeans — but the Clinton Administration has shown no willingness to deviate from the course set months ago.

## **National Sovereignty vs. International Institutions**

There is one crucial difference in principle between the NATO intervention in Bosnia and that about to take place in Kosovo which has not received sufficient examination. In Bosnia, the internationally recognized government (the Muslim regime of Alija Izetbegovic in Sarajevo) not only accepted but had long strongly favored outside intervention. On the other hand, in Kosovo (which is indisputably part of the territory of the Serbian Republic) the United States and NATO are demanding that a sovereign state consent to foreign occupation of its territory or be bombed if it refuses — even though Serbia has not attacked any neighboring state but is itself subject to attacks by forces infiltrated *from* a neighboring state. As Kissinger points out: "Yugoslavia, a sovereign state, is being asked to cede control and in time sovereignty of a province containing its national shrines to foreign military force." This distinction should be a key one for Americans, especially Republicans, concerned about the threat the growing power of international institutions presents to national sovereignty.

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RPC staff contact: Jim Jatras, 224-2946